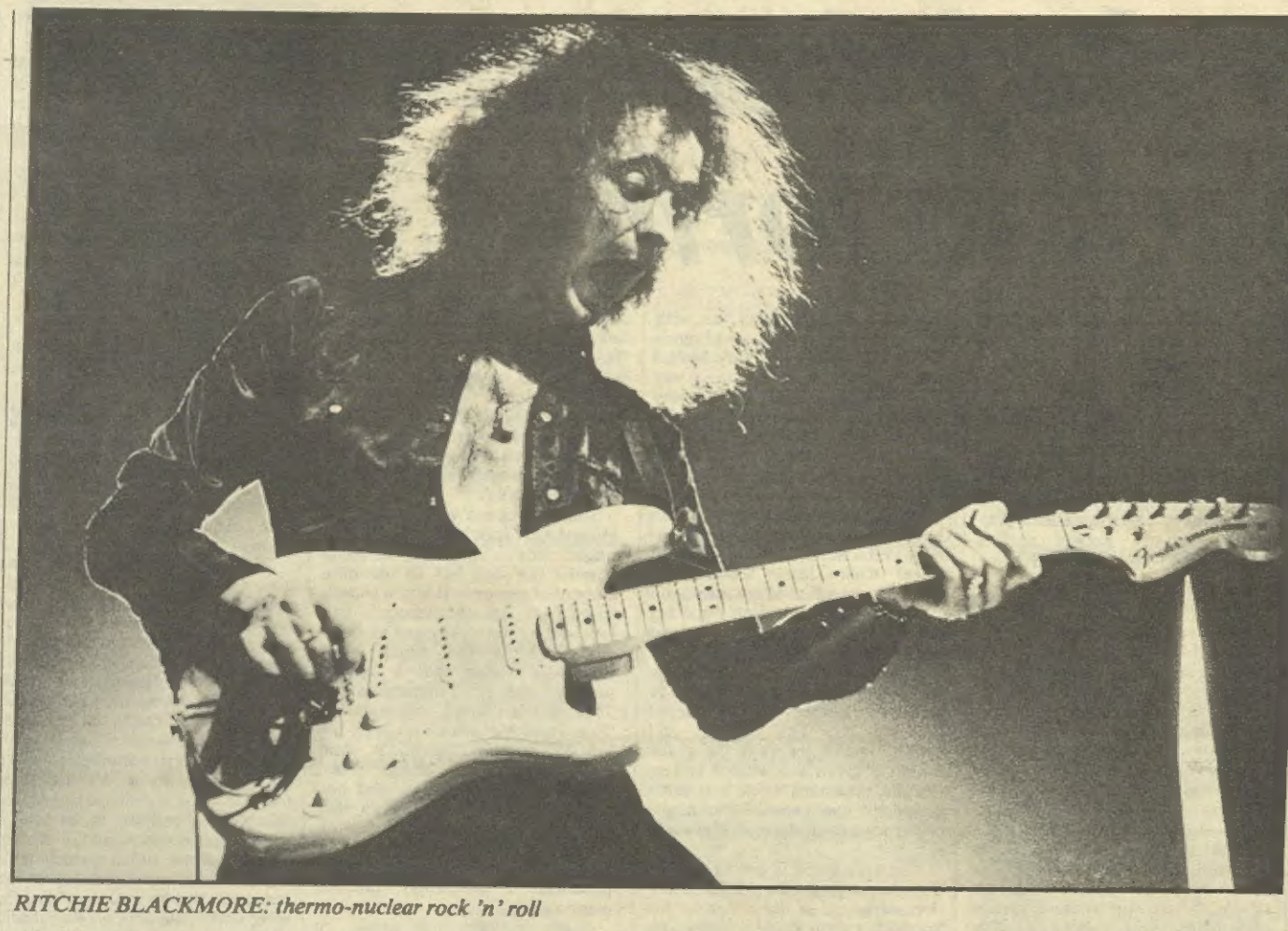
SOUNDS STAR RATING
***** Very Important Platter*
**** Good album, hear it if you can*

ALBUMS

**** Worthwhile*
*** Dull or disappointing*
** Re-cycle!*



RITCHIE BLACKMORE: thermo-nuclear rock 'n' roll

Rainbow's high-flying sorcery

RAINBOW: 'Rainbow Rising' (Oyster 2490 137) **

"WITH RAINBOW'S music I intend to carry on and expand upon the essence of Deep Purple — aggressiveness — and at the same time add a kind of medieval feel to it all,'

Thus spake Ritchie Blackmore in a SOUNDS interview dated August 2, 1975 — the last time, to my knowledge, the one-time Deep Purple guitarist visited Britain. Of course, it's been even longer since he actually played here and while this is disappointing I can't help but feel, in a twisted, abstract sort of way, that this lengthy absence from his home country hasn't altogether worked to his favour.

Bearing in mind the recent, much-discussed poor British displays of the Tommy Bolin incarnation of Deep Purple, Ritchie Blackmore is now, to most people, a hazy, indistinct, albeit fond, memory. A good deal of mystique surrounds not only the man but his band as well.

For, at the moment, Rainbow is an uncertain, undiscovered property, not being the band that appeared on last year's amorphous debut album. Gary Driscoll, Mickey Lee Soule and Craig Gruber have long since left the fold, only Blackmore and vocalist, lyricist Ronnie James Dio now remain. The rest of the group is, to British audiences at least, new and untried.

The Rainbow has, however, been carefully crafted, put together with no small amount of precision by Blackmore and Dio. The outfit now comprises, besides the aforementioned duo, Scottish bass player Jimmy Bain, late of Harlot; Tony Carey, Keyboard player, California-born, ex- of a band called Blessings; and old-timer Cozy Powell on drums, whose past credentials vary from the 'Ruff And Ready' Jeff Beck Group to a teenscream 'Dance With The Devil' solo career.

What can I say? This new line-up fits together as neatly as the guitar lead into the socket of Blackmore's well-worn Fender. It works.

'Rainbow Rising' is right, it achieves Blackmore's prime objective, as described in this review's opening quote, on the button — hard rocking, exciting music with an underlying medieval influence.

The album's accompanying biography lays great emphasis on Blackmore's admiration for German Baroque music and this comes through strongly — especially on the LP's standout track 'Stargazer' which has a deep-throated, brooding background (which Itake to be Tony Carey's mellotron work) coupled with some sweeping violins, all of which boosts an already potent, awesome rock sound. If court minstrels of yesteryear had had electric guitars instead of lutes, their odes could well have sounded like this.

But, first and foremost, 'Rainbow Rising' is thermo-nuclear rock 'n' roll, Blackmore's boundless enthusiam for his band shining through like the stark oil-painted rainbow on the album's cover (stylishly conceived by Ken Kelly, the man behind Kiss' 'Destroyer' sleeve). His riffs are fluid, freely-flowing, far removed from the tedious churning exercises that penetrated so many of the songs on his post-'Machine Head' Purple albums; his breaks — notably a soaring, searing solo on 'A Light In The Black' — are dextrous, never derivative.

Of the rest of the band, Dio and Powell shine above the others. Through his work with Elf, Dio has always been recognised as a talented vocalist. Yet with this album, lyrically, he comes into his own. His words lean towards fantastical, sword and sorcery subjects, the epic tale; his book lines (i.e.: 'Lady Starstruck, she's nothing but bad luck/Lady Starstruck, running after me') make an instant impression. Powell, meanwhile, bruises through the album like Bonzo Bonham, his drum work possessing the finesse of a punch-happy boxer whose fists have been hardened by years in the ring.

This is not to slight either Bain or Carey, both of whom pull their weight and make their respective presences felt throughout.

There are a mere six tracks, four to the first side, two to the second. Unlike the first album, which had the slow, somewhat reflective 'Catch The Rainbow', all are unflagging, powerful numbers — 'Tarot Woman' (refined, many faceted), 'Run With The Wolf' (solid and more simplistic), 'A Light In The Black', 'Starstruck', 'Do You Close Your Eyes' and the already-cited highlight, Rainbow's devil-may-care 'Stairway To Heaven', 'Stargazer'.

Playing the album at home, the remark being bandied about the most of all was, "With a few exceptions, this is better than anything Blackmore ever did with Deep Purple".

I tend to agree, and it's odds-on that you will, too —**Geoff Barton.**

IAN MATTHEWS: 'Go For Broke' (CBS 81316) 36 mins***

THOSE OF you for whom the magic name of Ian Matthews conjures up the days of sweet vocal duets with Sandy Denny is Fairport Convention, or the even sweeter, more countrified offerings of Matthews Southern Comfort will not find anything radically different about this album.

Ian's main problem, if he'll forgive me for saying so, is that his voice is just a bit too nice, his intonation just a bit too perfect, to convey sufficient depth of feeling. Each song is so sweetly rendered that I feared an attack of aural diabetes by the end of the album.

'Go For Broke' was recorded in Nashville with the help of literally millions of session musicians including members of the Muscle Shoals Horns and someone called Glen Spreen who doubtlessly isn't Bruce Sprinsteen's smaller brother. But seriously folks, them thar southern fried pickers certainly know how to put down some first class backings, and they must be paid well because the guitars always sound like they've just had new strings put on them.

Moving on to content — some of the numbers are self-penned, while for the rest — with a trillion great songs which Ian could have chosen to wrap those silky vocal chords around — we are stuck with things like 'Groovin', 'A Fool Like You' and 'Just One Look'.

Sorry mate. It just isn't enough to surround yourself with sought-after session musicians and record in a sought-after studio in Nashville. You've got to put some *life* into your singing, otherwise everything just floats along at one level, which may be tolerable for one song but a whole album — never. Which is a shame, because instrumentally it's superb.
— **Tony Mitchell**

ERWIN HELFER: 'Boogie Piano Chicago Style' (Big Bear BEAR 11)***

ERWIN HELFER starts side one in blue mood, briefly 'hallucinating' as in a reverie, and then, without warning, bursts into up-tempo boogie-woogie piano that is precisely what the album claims it to be; and all the tracks follow in similar fashion, whilst alternating from fast to slow to funky, but still within style. He has a very strong left hand, that lays a solid foundation for the right to go skipping where it will, and he makes what is in essence a difficult style to master seem ridiculously simple.

Along the way, he gives instrumental tribute to progenitors Albert Ammons and Pete Johnson, plus Jimmy Yancey, and friends Big Joe Williams and 'Sneaky Pete', and in his playing, there is more than a nod to Meade Lux Lewis. The titles are in themselves immaterial, as it is the performance that is important, but all-but-two are his own compositions, with three of these shared with Bob Hall, who himself is no slouch on the ivories.

Piano blues is a much abused and neglected form; the album for this reason alone should be given a chance, but with the quality of the music being so high, it should be heard by as many as possible. Big Bear are to be congratulated; and the only slight quibble, is why depict a white musician by black hands on the sleeve!!! —**Michael J.**

POCO: 'Rose Of Cimarron' (ABC ABCD-946) 35.35 mins.***

NOW I'VE been told by no less a figure than our editor that this is a mighty fine album and I know it means kneecap trouble if I don't wax ecstatic but this is C&W (I think) and that means a man's got to do the John Wayne thing and see it through.

Basically I think the intros and the outros are outstandingly attractive because that's when the play their instruments and in between is nothing to jump up and down about because that's when they sing. And why not jump up and down? Aren't they the most together bunch of harmonisers who ever downed their hoes? Very probably.

The point is *they* don't sound as though they're jumping up and down. Not happy, not sad, not emotional at all in fact. It's all very well to sound pretty but in all the sundry branches of the rock family you surely need some of that old gut feeling to be thrust through the soundwaves. I do and this doesn't.

Which is no way to say it's awful but — why do soft-rock C&W songs always open with some alluring piece of instrumental virtuosity on violin, mandolin, 12-string, banjo or pedal steel (all those lovely sounds it's such a sweet change to hear) and then the moment the singer(s) enter the fray things drop into a mundane chunkalong pattern behind those laid-back vocals (is it unmanly to show emotion? is that it? No, the women are just the same) and forsake all their vigour, aggression, plain energy, in the space of a bar?

Anyway that's how they achieve yet another 'sounds-the-same-from-beginning-to-end' country album. Don't shoot the pianist, shoot the singers — or kick them, put salt in their coffee, pee in their beer, anything to get their mad up.

Upon which may I speak in praise of the string arrangements on the title track (they create one haunting outro), of Rusty Young's madolin intro on 'Too Many Nights Too Long' and of all concerned on 'Tulsa Turnaround' a superbly springy raggish piece written and lead by guitarist Paul Cotton (who sings alone! no whipped cream harmonies! mercy!). — **Phil Sutcliffe.**

VARIOUS ARTISTS: 'Doowop Doowop' (DJM DJALM 2026)***

CALL IT the music of street corners, the layered harmonies practised in the underground or in a tiled bathroom. Doowop is the sound of the city, New York to be precise, when tight harmonies and trousers were all the rage. DJM have regularly released long gone masters of classic oldies like this stuff. They design decent covers, employ experts like Adam White to supply sleeve notes worth the price of the album, but alas all the packaging in the world cannot make up for the muffled sound of the old tapes.

In this respect, Springboard makes it almost impossible to recommend their albums without reservation. The material will be anxiously received by old collectors. But to the new listener, doowop by these vocal masters will sound flat and dull. Shameful, really.

Nevertheless, there are some emotional tear jerkers here if you're prepared to deal with imperfect tone. Of the better known vocal ballads we have The Five Satins classic 'In The Still of The Night', The Dub's mellow 'Could This Be Magic', The Crests' 'Sixteen Candles', and 'Step By Step', The Harptone's magnetic 'Sunday Kind Of Love' plus Lee Andrews and the Heart's powerful 'Long Lonely Nights'. There's the incredibly infectious 'Mary Lee' by the bouncing Rainbows and the Charts 'Desiree' is everything a good croon is all about.

For variation of material, authenticity and superb liner notes this set may well be worth your investment. After all, they don't scooby doo like they used to, do they? — **Robin Katz**

Steve: still in the black

STEVE MARRIOTT: 'Marriott' (A&M AMLH 64572) 41 mins**

THIS IS Steve's first solo album, and is split between sessions done with British band composed of Greg Ridley, Ian Wallace and Mickey Finn, who take up one side, and with a bevy of American musicians too numerous to mention, who take up the other.

And this approach seems to have worked very well for someone who evidently has two fairly distinct musical directions: straightforward rock/blues, which you find on the British side and a much funkier, jazzier feel which Steve has laid down with his American friends.

The quality of musicianship is excellent throughout, and I think it's a tribute to producers Kenny Kerner and Richie Wise that an album with these differences holds together so well. Of course it could also be something to do with Mr Marriott's excellent vocal work, particularly on the funky side where he sounds as black as you can get.

There is a satisfyingly mature feel to the whole album that allows you to slide straight into the listenin' of it just like someone had put vaseline on your eardrums. About half the songs were actually co-written by Steve (these include the Marriott/Lane composition 'Wam Bam Thank You Ma'am', while others are drawn from diverse sources including Leon Russell ('Help Me Through The Day').

What else can I say? It sounds right, it's Steve Marriott, buy it. — Tony Mitchell